جامعة بيرزيت

Birzeit University Newsletter

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Birzeit graduate part of US team discovering breakthrough cancer cure

Above: Elie Hanania in the Anderson laboratory. *Photo by Carlos Antonio Rios*

"Medicine is poised on the threshold of a new era, venturing into a region too small to see, yet too vast to comprehend. For two centuries, doctors have viewed disease at the cellular level, fighting the bacteria and viruses that invade cells. Now, researchers are peering deeper, working with particles invisible or almost invisible even to a microscope. As they unravel the mysteries of life's basic fibre, the DNA molecule, they are finding ways to fix flaws in the genes that shape life. And they are bringing new hope to the fight against cancer and other devistating diseases."

- From "The Gene Doctors", a special report by *The Houston Chronicle* (2 April 1995) -

Birzeit graduate Elie Hanania, 31, grew up in Jerusalem with an early interest in science. When his mother refused to buy him a chemistry set because it was too dangerous, he saved his money and bought one anyway. After graduating from Birzeit he traveled to the United States to study for a Ph.D. in human genetics and molecular biology at the UT Medical Branch in Galverston. At a 1991 meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research, Hanania caused a stir with his work with the retinoblastoma gene and particularly impressed Dr. Albert B. Deisseroth, who headed a lab in the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston.

Deisseroth realised Hanania was the perfect person to carry out research for his laboratory, describing him as "a world class expert in working with mice", and invited him to join his team at Anderson. For Hanania, who wanted to do gene therapy, this was a natural step, and he began work with Anderson's scholar Dr. Siqing Fu on creating a virus that would carry the anti-cancer gene in the body of ovarian cancer patients.

If discovered early, ovarian cancer can be treated, approaching a 90 percent success rate. The gene used for this treatment at Anderson, MDR-1, acts as a pump to spew anti-

(continued on back page)

FEATURES

Graduation 1995 *p 2-3*
Distinguished Palestinian industrialist Omar Al-Aggad (above) is presented with an honorary doctorate to acknowledge his pioneering contibutions to constructing the modern state in the Arab world, and his long support of Birzeit.

Birzeit's new Law Centre *p 4-5*
Birzeit's new Law Centre takes on the challenge of untangling 800 years of legal spaghetti in the occupied territories.

Birzeit through the eyes of the Western media *p 6-7*
Visiting English professor Toine van Teeflen looks at the linguistic implications of Birzeit's representation in the Western media.

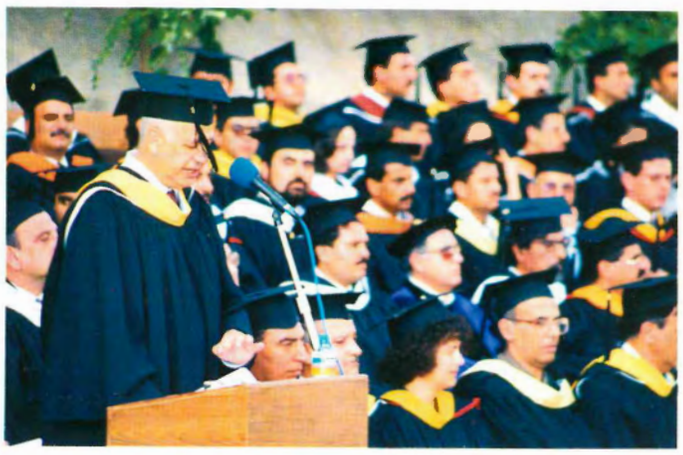
Birzeit student elections: A model for Palestinian democracy *p 8-13*
Full report and photo-feature on the new election system inside.

Insects don't have borders *p 14-16*
Birzeit's environmental health unit finds that Israeli permits dry up for outreach workers involved in training farmers.

Making education illegal for Gazan students *p 18-19*
Gaza students at the university find their education sacrificed on the Israeli altar of security.

Academic freedom *p 17*
International relations *p 20-22*
In memorium *p 23*
New publications *p 24*

Another year graduates: the class of



"All of Palestine is involved in the process of building - not only with stone - but building a society. We cannot build the roof without building the foundations first and it is our duty as a university to build solid foundations. As I look at this 20th class of graduates, I am sure that they too will participate in the building of a strong foundation for our future state. We will struggle to have this state as one that is independent, modern and democratic - a state where its primary assets are its young men and women." *President Dr. Hanna Nasir, 10 July 1995*

On 10th July 1995, another 440 students received their degree certificates at a lively graduation ceremony held on the new campus of Birzeit University. The ceremony began with a minute's silence for the martyrs of the university, followed by the national anthem. There was a presentation to the families of the eleven martyrs to acknowledge their sons' sacrifice in the struggle for Palestinian independence.

The university president, Dr. Hanna Nasir acknowledged, at this the 20th graduation ceremony, that "The students who graduate today have faced tremendous challenges due to the continuous harassments inflicted by occupation; imprisonment, interrogation and the closure of areas resulting in restrictions on the freedom of movement, to cite some examples. Some students who are graduating are currently in prison and are not therefore able to collect their degrees in person." To underline the point, nine graduating Gazan students arrived late for the ceremony, after being delayed for several hours at Erez checkpoint outside Gaza.

Of the changes in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, Dr. Nasir commented, "For years we have lived under occupation. We still are, but we do realise that its painful realities are changing. For sure we have not achieved what we have dreamed and yearned for, yet we must also remember that the occupation too, has not achieved what it had planned. This is not the place for political discussion of who has lost or who has won, rather this is the time when it is our responsibility to build our society."

There was a special presentation of an honorary doctorate to Omar Al-Aggad, a Palestinian who has contributed much to the rebuilding of Arab society. Al-Aggad, an honorary member of Birzeit's Board of Trustees and the donor who made possible the construction of the Engineering Building that bears his name, was the second to receive an honorary doctorate from Birzeit University, the first presented to Palestinian academic Edward Said in 1993. Born in Jaffa, Al-Aggad

Left: Graduation day 1995. Dr. Hanna Nasir presents Omar Al-Aggad (right) with an honorary doctorate, while Dr. Darweesh Nazal (centre), Chairman of the Board of Trustees looks on.

More than 5,000 visitors were present at the ceremony.

Photo by Garo Nalbandian.

1995 prepares for a new future

was forced to leave his homeland in the wake of the events of 1948. He moved to Saudi Arabia, where he established major construction industries. A founding member of the Institute for Palestine Studies and member of the Palestine National Council of the PLO, this was his first trip to the West Bank since 1967, happily coinciding with the graduation ceremony.

The text of his doctorate stated that, "Today, the university honours Mr. Al-Aggad for his pioneering role in the public economic field, building institutions, establishing industries that have contributed to constructing the modern state in the Arab World and for his distinguished contribution in supporting Birzeit University, especially the Faculty of Engineering building that bears his name."

Dr. Nasir also spoke of how "the special relationship of partnership between the society and the university forms an ideal structure for future policies of development. This relationship is not new at Birzeit. For years, since the founding of the university, we have offered educational programmes that directly serve the society's needs - programmes in health, literacy, environmental health and continuing education. Next year, for the first time, we will be offering Masters programmes in International Relations and Education. All these are examples of practical services that can also help provide the well-trained personnel needed in the many departments of the new Palestinian National Authority."

Birzeit also honoured the Palestinian Ministry of Education in the for its "remarkable" work in "not only stopping the deterioration" resulting from 27 years of neglect of the educational system, but "recording impressive achievements" in its rebuilding. Education Minister Yasser Amer was presented with a plaque acknowledging the Ministry's work.

Three new graduates talk about their courses and plans for the future

A long path to a degree: Basem Sabbah, BSc. in Physics.

Basem began his degree course in 1986, one of a family of four brothers and four sisters, out of which five wanted to pursue a university education. Originating from Qaffin village in the Tulkarem district, Basem chose physics, while his three brothers chose engineering. From 1987 until 1990, Basem was unable to pursue his studies due to the Israeli closure of Birzeit University. When he began to participate in the off-campus teaching, which the university had first concentrated on providing to those nearer the end of their courses, he found there were some problems with this, "I was only able to take a few courses as some of the physics courses required laboratories which we didn't have," he says, "There was also a shortage of books. These were the problems of the Intifada." In 1992, he began studying again after the university's reopening. Now Basem is looking for a position as a physics teacher in a school.

Scholarship student: Abeer Abu Shalbak, BA in Management and Business Administration.

Originating from the village of Lifta near Jerusalem, Abeer is the first graduate amongst her two brothers and three sisters. Beginning her course in 1990, she later took advantage of the academic links between Birzeit and the University of Amsterdam to take part in a scholarship programme in the 1993/94 academic year. "The scholarship gave me more experience, new insights and I had the opportunity to learn about another culture. It gave me better opportunities for the future." Abeer explains: "I had the chance to take courses that weren't available at Birzeit. In Palestine the academic focus is often on the United States. In Amsterdam, I learnt a lot about Europe." Abeer hopes to work for a development organisation in Palestine and perhaps take a masters degree course in the future.

Gazan student: Nasser Shakshak, BA in Economics.

Nasser originates from Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip and began his Economics degree in 1990. In common with all Gazan students, he experienced major problems obtaining permits from Israel necessary to study. "It's a big problem," says Nasser, "The plan of the Israeli government to separate the West Bank from the Gaza Strip causes problems. Israel would prefer students to stay in the same place so it can keep track of them." This bureaucratic harassment causes profound disruptions to students' courses. During one blanket cancellation of permits in 1993, Nasser took refuge with other students in the mountains after raids by the Israeli military on Gazan student homes. A reflection of the economic situation in Gaza, Nasser was also forced to suspend his course for a year due to financial problems. Now, he is applying to an organisation that helps small business projects, to begin a library in the Strip, where there is a great shortage of library services.

Photos credits: Nigel Parry

The new Law Centre: "An important

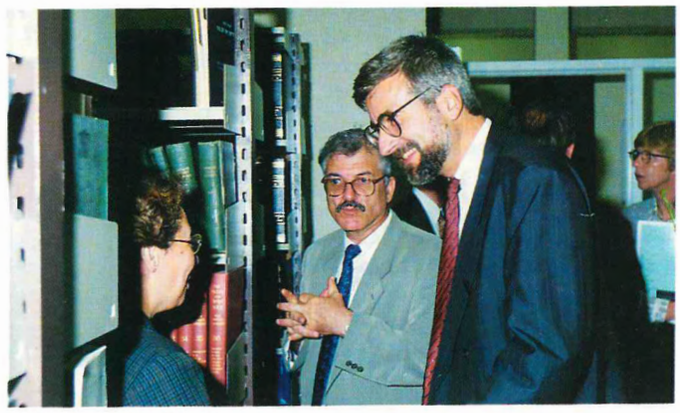


photo: Yasser Darweesh

Above: Director Camile Mansour (centre) discusses the Law Centre's work with the Consul-General of France, Mr. Jean de Gliniasty, in the Centre's library.

The legal status quo

The legal status quo in the West Bank and Gaza is a nightmare of labyrinthine proportions. The West Bank still follows elements of Jordanian law, Gaza following parts of the pre-existing British Mandate legislation. On top of these, there are old, mostly land-orientated laws from the Ottoman Empire; rulings from Islamic shariah courts; the demands of international human rights covenants to which Israel is a signatory that have a bearing on its treatment of Palestinians in the territories; and a multitude of Israeli Military Orders. The maze is further complicated by existing legislation from the Palestinian National Council, the decision-making body of the PLO, that apply to Palestinians both in the Diaspora and in Palestine.

In this complicated legal arena there are significant problems: an absence of Palestinian legislation; the seizure of legislative activity and administration by the Israeli military government; accompanying fetters on the normal activities of the judges and lawyers in the Palestinian courts; three separate bar associations, insufficient control over access to the profession; and an absence of an adequate environment for the training of lawyers and judges.

The opening of the Centre

On Thursday, April 27th, 1995, the Law Centre at Birzeit University was officially opened, after long consultation with a large number of Palestinian jurists, in the light of the situation of the ongoing political process. Birzeit University defined two main objectives for the Law Centre: to contribute to the rehabilitation of the legal professions, and to contribute to the preparatory effort for the Palestinian legislative process.

These goals were officially approved by the Birzeit Board of Trustees on May 6th, 1994 after much work by four members of Birzeit's faculty and administration: then Vice-President Gabi Baramki, who initiated the project; Mr. Raja Shehadeh, who was very much involved in its conceptualisation; Mr. Ghassan Faramand, who organised the start of the Centre's activities; and Mr. Camille Mansour, director of the Centre and professor of political science at the University of Paris on secondment to Birzeit University.

Mansour stated at the opening that, "The work of the Centre has no meaning if it is not in the service of the entire Palestinian society and its structures." The Law Centre is supported by the Palestinian legal community, both individuals and the three Bar associations, and has an advisory council made up of Palestinian jurists from Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan, who have also worked hard for the establishment of the Centre. Mansour further commented: "The wisdom of Birzeit has been to think about the duties of the university in the legal field without any preconceived ideas. Birzeit has historically based its decisions on the needs of Palestinian society. Instead of deciding to create a prestigious yet premature institution such as a law school, Birzeit has questioned the Palestinian community about its most urgent needs that it could and should fulfill."

The Law Centre will provide an opportunity for training, research, teaching and documentation for Palestinian civil servants, legal professionals, jurists, academics, educators and students. The Centre represents, in the words of President Hanna Nasir, "part of a larger common project, that of building a democratic society, independent nation and productive and prosperous economy in Palestine. The Law Centre has an important mission in this critical period."

In the months and years ahead, the Palestinian Authority will have to face the challenge of passing legislation with the view of unifying, slowly but surely, the law in force in the West Bank and in Gaza. Regardless of the progress of the peace process, it is vital that the Palestinian people prepare for the coming responsibilities of statehood, making the existing legal labyrinth more equitable by revoking or amending the Israeli Military Orders which discriminate and adopting laws guaranteeing human rights, and modernising existing laws through codification in line with the changing conditions in Palestine and the world.

A centre for resources

The Law Centre will also contain a library and associated computer-indexed documentation centre, as a depository and an observatory of past and current Palestinian legislative and judicial activities. The need for the library in particular is great as there is currently no adequate library in the occupied territories. As an April 25th Law Centre information sheet points out, "Some individual libraries maintained by practicing lawyers are even better than institutional ones."

The Centre launched its Law Library Campaign in late 1994, asking for local, regional and international legal reference books, statutes and law reports. With generous donations from the families of the late lawyers Shafik El-Assal, Jamil Shalhoub and Hatem Abdul-Hadi, a good portion of the primary Palestinian legal sources are now available. The French Consulate, USAID, the British Council and the Belgian Consulate have also assisted with reference materials on Comparative Law. The Centre aims to collect 12,000 volumes in two years.

mission in a critical period".

Sponsorship

The Law Centre was initially made possible by financial support from the Ford Foundation and institutional support from UNRWA. The construction of a new building to house the Centre and furnishing of a temporary Centre has been enabled by the sustained support and funding of the French Government. At the April 27th opening, Dr. Nasir emphasised that, "This support is not simply a matter of a financial donation; it represents the efforts and commitment of individuals and the strong relations of cooperation built by these individuals over the years." Both the Consul-General of France, Mr. Jean de Gliniasty, and the Cultural Attaché, Mr. Alain Bockel, were present at the opening.

THE LAW CENTRE STAFF. Front row, from left: Ruba El-Shuaibi (researcher), Haitham El-Zu'bi (researcher), Randa Mina (administrative assistant), Camille Mansour (director), Manal El-Ju'beh (research assistant). Back row, from left: Jamal El-Sousi (Gaza representative), Ghassan Faramond (deputy director), Genia Helou (conferences coordinator), Ihab Abu Ghosh (researcher), John MacFarlane (documentation assistant). *Photo by Khaled Al-Naji.*

Training and research

The training component of the Centre's work has progressed rapidly since its work began in 1993. Many seminars have already taken place with topics covering: *Administrative Law, The Legal and Institutional Conditions for Economic Activity, The Legal System in the West Bank between 1948 and 1967, The Palestinian Drafts for the Electoral System, Humanitarian International Law,* and *The System of Co-ownership.* These have included the participation of lawyers, judges, high-ranking government officials, businessmen, and representatives from political organisations. A two-day conference was held in Gaza on April 28th, entitled *What Legal System for Palestine?* and another was held in June on *Labour Law.* Two are planned for 1996, entitled *International Contract and Investment Law.*

The research component is proceeding with the projects covering *Judicial Organisation in Palestine, Labour Law, Childrens Rights, Banking Law, Administrative Law,* and *Zoning and Planning Law.* The Centre has given priority to creating an inventory of the law presently in force in the West Bank and Gaza, focusing on one area of the law after another and systematically compiling the relevant texts. These areas of research have been contracted to Palestinian jurists, political scientists, sociologists and educators.

With 11 staff employed by the Centre at the moment, including a director, deputy-director, administrative assistant, librarian, seminar coordinator, three research assistants, a system analyst, a coordinator for the Centres activities in Gaza and an information and documentation assistant sent by Canadian NGO OCSD/Oxfam-Québec, one might be tempted to think the Centre was over-resourced. Director Camille Mansour addressed this issue at the Centre's opening, pointing out that, "despite the rapid growth in the Centre's personnel, both what there is to do and what is possible to do have already largely exceeded the capacities of the Centre."

Future academic programmes

With a teaching component in the Centre's future, servicing both existing faculties with law courses and with the possible creation of an MA programme in Legal Studies, the Centre has a positive future for Palestinian education itself, as well as society at large. Dr. Hanna Nasir concluded at the opening, "The development of law and of impartial and professional legal institutions is vital to all aspects of this project. The Law Centre, I believe, has significant contributions to make, as its activities to date already attest. For grand aims are not fulfilled simply by resolution; they are fulfilled through detailed work, careful planning, and integrated projects, conducted by able professionals and supported by adequate infrastructure. None of these activities or facilities would have been possible without the substantial assistance from our international colleagues and the human resources of our faculty and staff. The Birzeit University Law Centre is at the beginning of an exciting and productive process; I invite you to accompany us on our journey."

For more information about the Law Centre or Law Library Campaign, please write to:

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The Law Centre is also available via e-mail:
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Birzeit University through the

Edited extracts from the paper given by Toine van Teeffelen, a visiting professor in discourse analysis in Birzeit's Department of English, at the 4th International Academic Conference.

This lecture is about media stereotypes and distorted communication in which I want to look at the question: How do Westerners represent an institution which seems to *resist* stereotyping, an institution which, with the best will of the world, is rather difficult to frame as threatening and violent?

My approach is primarily language-orientated, concerned with how linguistic patterns function in a social/political context in the media. My primary aim is to provide a description of the various language repertoires found in 15 selected articles from the Western or Western-orientated media, covering a period of about ten years from the beginning of the *Intifada* onwards. You can say that these repertoires define the 'building blocks' that exist in Western countries on which one can establish one's opinion about Birzeit, and through Birzeit, one's opinions about Palestinian reality. The newspapers chosen include: *The New York Times, the Times Educational Supplement; NRC - Handelsblad*, the Dutch mainstream elite paper; and *The Jerusalem Post.* The articles relate to important periods in Birzeit's history: the closure of the university and underground classes; the re-opening of the university in 1992; and after the signing of the Declaration of Principles, interviews with Birzeit spokespersons concerning the university's potential role in state-building.

The 'law and order' repertoire

In the official Israeli view, which can be termed the 'law and order' repertoire, Birzeit is represented as having people or political groups infiltrate the university to "incite" or "agitate" students, who subsequently are sent out to conduct "subversive" or "radical" activities in "cells" in the community at large. Often the process is described as a mechanical, automated one, the university a "magnet" or "focal point" for radical activists. Birzeit is often described as a "hotbed" or "breeding ground". This view has traditionally served to justify closures of the university, Birzeit's academic credentials being played down. This repertoire is often quoted in the press as an official view, without much criticism or endorsement, except in *The Jerusalem Post.*

In response to this view, the European and American media seemed to increasingly allow room at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s for what you can call a 'human rights' repertoire, which challenged the authority of the official view.

The 'human rights' repertoire

"Education as a crime", "underground education", "clandestine classes" and a "Kafkaesque" Israeli policy are some of the main rhetorical expressions with which many Birzeit University press statements underscored the illegality and absurdity of the closures of Palestinian educational institutions. These expressions were repeatedly quoted in the Western press.

The human rights repertoire also succeeded on occasions in turning the law and order repertoire against itself. Drawing attention to phrases such as "illegal cells of education" and similar expressions employed by the Israeli military authorities served to underline the absurdity of the Israeli stand.

photo: Yasser Darweesh

Toine van Teeffelen at the 4th Academic Conference, held in March 1995 at Birzeit. Papers from the conference are expected to be published by September 1995 (see page 21).

The sometimes critical Western coverage of Israeli measures against Palestinian education in the Occupied Territories was helpful in pressurising Israel to allow the universities to function again. Yet, it was interesting to see how articles about the re-opening repeated - in a positive premise - many of the ideas that made up the law and order repertoire: Birzeit was "gradually" or "cautiously" reopened; Israeli had "offered", "agreed upon" or "permitted" the "resumption" of classes. Quotes from then Israeli defence minister Moshe Arens suggested that a kind of gesture was extended, as if a positive deed was performed, dubbed a "confidence building measure" or a measure of "normalisation". It was reminiscent of Israeli statements in the 1970s that it had "permitted" the establishment of Palestinian universities.

The 'tension release' repertoire

The 'tension release' repertoire can also accommodate certain Israeli concerns and also adopts an exterior viewpoint. Language enthusiasts can find a gold mine of metaphors here. The university is seen as a kind of pressure-cooker, with a high level of tension among students due to "rising" emotions and frustrations attributed to the oppressive conditions in which they live. The more the tension is repressed by Israeli restrictions, the greater the need to release the tension in a so-called "explosion" of violence; here we meet the popular psychological theory that frustration leads to aggression. Other comparable metaphors of violence within this repertoire include an "earthquake", "volcano" or "boiling water".

This repertoire differs from the law and order metaphor in that it views emotions as being the underlying force responsible for political activism, rather than conspiracies. Yet the repetoire's focus, on the 'pressure cooker' scenario, is also often used by both Western liberals who argue that the closure of universities is counterproductive (as more pressure leads to more violence), and also by Israelis, deriving authority through this viewpoint from the Israeli public's anxiety-loaded fears of violence threatening the political order; the "mob" or "Third World rebellion" concept. Interestingly Israel itself has offered

the view that the Palestinian universities were established as a kind of "safety valve" to allow the release of tension among the population. Whether the liberals adopted this concept from the Israeli repertoire or vice-versa is unclear in this 'which came first, the chicken or the egg?' question but clearly both sides are appealing to the idea that this dynamic is mechanical, existing as a powerful fact, overriding the self-control of those in its 'grip': an emphasis on the mechanics of violent behaviour rather than on the socio-economic and political reasons and motives people bring forward when arguing about an unbearable reality.

The factor of article length

Longer articles tend to what Edward Said described as giving the Palestinians "permission to narrate". A November 1993 article on Birzeit University in the Dutch newspaper *NRC - Handelsblad* is one-and-a-half pages long, and contains stories expressed by Birzeit students, faculty and administration: stories of cautious optimism about Birzeit's future; stories of daily suffering and steadfastness during the university's closure, and stories of activism, including a willingness to sacrifice in the struggle against the occupation. Compared to the mechanical view of exploding emotions and similar metaphors, hearing this discourse is quite a relief since it provides a more differentiated and human view of people's emotions and experiences.

semantics *n* **1.** the study of the meanings of words and other parts of language. **2.** the general study of signs and what they stand for.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

Still, the concentration on emotion is apparent. In the article mentioned the title, lead, and frame story of the interviewer's visit suggest that life at the university is dominated by emotions. The title, "Broken Dreams" begins this trend, followed by a lead that finishes with a quote from one of those interviewed: "Resentment and distrust determine the relations; danger and threats appear at all sides." Students and faculty are described as "proud", "suspicious", "shy", "eager", saying things "emotionally"; they feel "uneasy", "desperate", "disillusioned" and "resentful", most of the emotions described falling into the negative register.

As a Dutchman I should add that Dutch people tend to pride themselves in being cool, level-headed, and practical. The journalist's own somewhat distanced and ironic descriptions are being deliberately contrasted with the emotions of his interviewees.

An article in *The New York Times* is similarly titled "Among Palestinians, Worry and Rage"; the French paper *Liberation* introduces the university as: "Birzeit between Hope and Refusal."

The 'institution building' repertoire

This repertoire perhaps comes closest to how most members of the Birzeit community see themselves. What is stressed in this repertoire is the specific mission of Birzeit as an academic institution that serves Palestinian society. It suggests that the university fulfills a civilised mission, implementing general values of science and nation building. Rhetorically speaking, this repertoire emphasises optimism, agency, determination, reasonableness and moderation. Scholarship can only nourish in a liberal and tolerant environment. The "autonomy", "independence", and "relevance" of Birzeit to society are key words here.

The discourse in this repertoire is rarely represented as solid or indisputable, noted by the presence of a Western/Israeli viewpoint that expresses - undisturbed by self-criticism - the belief that Western academia is superior, a standard against which a so-called "Third World" university is judged.

Examples of this include Georg Szpiro's article in the November 1987 edition of *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, where he asks, "is Birzeit producing a genuine intelligentsia which will one day assume responsible leadership of its people," or "will it be left at the mercy of semi-literate fanatics". *The Jerusalem Post*, on February 2nd, 1994 asked, "Will the university be able to churn out a generation of Palestinian statesmen, administrators and economists equipped to handle the new responsibilities? Or will it, following the example of some Third World universities, continue to be a hotbed of political militancy?" *The Jerusalem Post* article, entitled "Back to Basics", assumes in its subtext that Palestinian nationalism is a negative entity, quoting students in a way that it seems as though they "admit" or "concede" that they previously put too much effort into nationalist activities and that now they are back on the right path. Director of Public Relations Albert Aghazarian is quoted in a way that suggests he concurs with the concept of Birzeit as a "hotbed" and "prefers to" talk about the university as an academic institution.

The journalist as 'observer' and definer of reality

To conclude, as one might expect, room has been made for Palestinian narratives and voices to be expressed in Western discourse. Additionally, voices framed as reasonable, moderate and balanced (i.e. not overtly strong in criticising Israel) are positively evaluated, as are voices that express stories of human suffering. Voices presented as nationalist or activist are at best doubtful and controversial. Journalists appear very much to cloak themselves in a variety of Western-style roles of observer: as a psychologist diagnosing Palestinian emotions; as a critical journalist trying to assess whether Palestinian universities such as Birzeit will remain politicised and nationalistic; and as an academic who ponders about the dilemmas between academia and politics. In all of these roles, there is little criticism of Israel's assumed authority to open and close the universities in Palestine at will. The positional superiority of these three roles has the power to set norms in providing a *de facto* framework for readers to 'understand' the 'complex' Palestinian question. It therefore remains to be seen whether Palestinian narratives and voices can really fulfill their communicational purpose and reach their true destination.

Birzeit student council elections:

A new system for a new era

After the last student council elections in November 1993 and before the scheduled elections in November 1994, students at Birzeit decided that they wanted to change the system of election to, and structure of, the student council. For 20 years, student politics at the university had been dominated by a first-past-the-post system that led groups to a prevailing "all or nothing" belief, affecting everything from the style of their campaigns to the resulting pre-election coalition deals stuck by the most unlikely minority parties in attempts to secure representation for their points of view. This status quo, the growing worldwide popularity of proportional representation electoral systems, and certainly the influence on students of seeing the processes of the Israeli proportional representation system reported in the media, have combined to prompt this change, which the majority of students feel is for the better.

photo: Nigel Parry

A popular decision

In a referendum in the weeks prior to the election in which 49% of eligible students voted, 74% opted for the new system. Director of Student Affairs Nazmi Ju'beh, also Head of the Elections Committee, explained that this vote was confirmed by another referendum that took place on the day of the election, "2,384 students voted on the new system, 2,005 expressing support for it and 336 against it. There were 43 spoilt papers. This means that 85.6% of those who voted were in support of the new system, or 71.6% of the whole student body. An overwhelming majority."

Preparations for the system took a long time. Details were thrashed out by the different student blocs, resulting in a very structured set of guidelines for candidates, the campaigning process and the formation of the student council. "The students did a great job," says Ju'beh, who coordinated the restructuring. A Birzeit graduate himself, who worked first as a history lecturer before being appointed to head the Office of Student Affairs, Ju'beh has both the perspective of the students and his experience in the university to draw from. The students, who recognise that they are dealing with someone with an understanding of their priorities, have appreciated his assistance and understand that there is no favouritism. This proved important as, "there was a dominating mentality that the bigger the party, the more rights it has," according to Ju'beh, "This year everyone has had to respect the existence of other blocs." Independent candidates who chose not to stand for election on the traditional Palestinian party-political lines ran for the first time this year, and although none gained a seat, this was a significant development.

The new parliamentry system

Students now elect a 51-seat parliament that is to decide all important student issues. Blocs of students representing different ideologies and approaches to the student council are registered 3 months before the election with the overseeing committee, and are submitted by blocs representing different parties. The percentage of votes from the election are calculated to decide how many seats each bloc gets.

After the election, the factions decide which of their candidates will be chosen for their available seats. From this base, a majority vote by the members decides a further, more focused governing body or "cabinet" of 11 members including the student council president. The proposal for the composition of the cabinet is initially made by the party with the largest number of seats in the student parliament. This is expected to be the time when groups try to form coalitions to secure the best deal for themselves. Nazmi Ju'beh smiles as he said, "Each party gets a week to try. If the largest party doesn't succeed in forming a cabinet, the next largest party gets to try, and so on. If everyone fails then I, as Head of the Elections Committee, will choose a directly proportional cabinet. With 51 seats in the parliament, a party will get one representative in the cabinet for every 4.6 seats they hold."

Significant changes resulting from the new system

In the last elections, during November 1993, in what was satirically described by some as an "unholy alliance", left-wing parties joined in a pre-election coalition with the Islamic bloc to coax power from the pro-Arafat *Shabiba* faction that had dominated student politics for eight years. In the wake of the "Gaza-Jericho First" Oslo accords, the coalition ran on a "Jerusalem First" ticket, gaining control of the student council by 120 votes under the previous "winner takes all" system.

Ellen Saba, a representative of the left-wing Labour Front who was elected to the 1993/94 student council, commented at the time that, "I don't find it strange that a Christian woman like myself runs for the same list as the Islamic Bloc; it is a matter of winning or losing."

Naturally, the left-Islamic marriage led to a compromise on both sides in how the coalition presented itself during the election campaign. The new regulations prevent this from happening. Nazmi Ju'beh commented that, "Because pre-election coalitions were forbidden, the blocs' identities were clearer this year and now we know exactly the influence of each bloc."

a model for Palestinian democracy

In the week prior to the elections, the time permitted for campaigning was reduced from three-and-a-half days to just two. "This meant that it was less expensive for the various student blocs this time," says Ju'beh, "and as everyone knew they were likely to get represented under the new system, campaigns were not so excessive." Locations for big banners and time-slots for the rallies of the different blocs were allocated by the time-honoured method of pulling pieces of paper out of hats. The elections went smoothly, "without any critical moments", with even right-wing Israeli daily *The Jerusalem Post* reporting on May 31st that they "passed without fuss or incident". Ju'beh put this down to the new system, "Everyone was sure to be represented." In fact the result," in Ju'beh's opinion, "was pretty much the same as last year. Nothing much changed."

Birzeit Public Relations Director Albert Aghazarian cited that the 1995 elections at Birzeit were, "a model for Palestinian democracy." The university has a history of encouraging the democratic process. Vice-President Ibrahim Abu Lughod headed a committee established in the wake of the Oslo accords to make recommendations to the Palestinian Authority about the system that should be employed for the impending national elections. The elections this year were attended by representatives from the Nablus-based Centre for Palestine Research and Studies, who were interested to observe the voting and counting process.

The campaigns

Last elections, two months after the September 1993 Oslo accords, were an opportunity for students to voice their opinions about the nature of the peace agreements. As Palestinians have no elected national representatives under occupation, student elections are seen as a barometer of Palestinian public opinion. Professor Riad Malki, from Birzeit's engineering department, commented at the time, "The elections are important because they are political and reflect the mood of the people after the signing of the autonomy deal."

Consequently, most of the political groups include national issues in their campaigns. "At the time of the Oslo accords," Ju'beh pointed out, "Palestinian society was polarised into two camps - those who supported that particular peace deal and those who didn't. This year there was less emphasis on national issues, reflecting the changing mood of the people. A year and a half after the deal those "pro" it are less pro and those "anti", less anti. We saw an increased focus on student issues, including: the comprehensive exam students have to take at the end of their degree course; the cost of student tuition fees; the prices in university cafeterias; the participation of masters students in the life of the student council; and the role of independents in student political life."

Many of the groups did make symbolic and political references to the ongoing issues of the peace process; one bloc calling itself the "Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Bloc", the "Progress and Democracy Bloc", and another, the "Homeland and Democracy Bloc".

Students also held a debate, and in their rally presentations included sketches, music, and dancing; the atmosphere often more reminiscient of a party than an election. Julia Hawkins, an international student studying Arabic at Birzeit, commented, "It was a long way from the lethargy of the kind of student union elections I am used to in Britain."

The future

The new election regulations currently do not consider a student who is studying for a diploma or a masters degree programme eligible to vote. The students decided this as they felt that these students, who are generally mature students and part-time, do not participate in university life enough to make informed decisions affecting the welfare of all students. At the moment, with their negligible numbers, this perhaps is not a huge issue, but Nazmi Ju'beh estimates that in the next two or three years, as the masters programmes expand, there will be 300-400 students to contend with. "Then", he says with a twinkle, "There may be a problem!"

Whatever the processes that elections are due to go through in the next few years, what is clear is that students, faculty and administration are getting a profound insight into the development and, indeed, excitement of the road to democracy.

Student Council Elections: a photographic A to Z

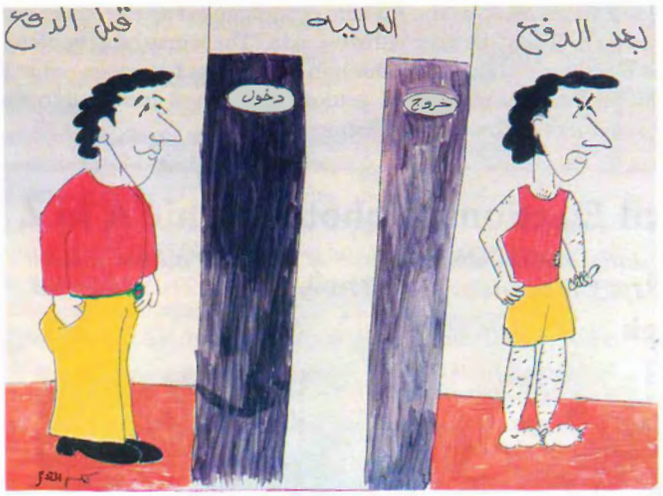
A look at the campaigns, voting and counting processes of the recent student council elections, held on 24 May 1995. Photographs by Nigel Parry unless otherwise credited.

The campaign week

photo: Yasser Darweesh

Specially errected noticeboards give each bloc the chance to express themselves with slogans, cartoons, and commentary and to explain their policies to the student body.

Above: Election week, and the campus is festively draped with flags, streamers, banners and posters. Student blocs are allocated time slots for presentations, and switch their larger banners to different walls on different days. Some sites are better than others therefore are allocated by a lottery system.



Left: One of the many cartoons that surfaced during the election. From left to right, a before/after image of a student visiting the university finance office to pay his tuition fees and other costs. This universal student issue was certainly not absent from the Birzeit elections! *Photo by Yasser Darweesh.*

Right: Blocs made election props to grab students' attention. Left, the Islamic Bloc's Dome of the Rock. On the right, the Al-Quds Bloc blimp. At the end of the elections, the blimp came loose and was discovered a few days later inside Israel by some perplexed soldiers. *Photos by Yasser Darweesh.*

Election day .... the voting process ...

Above left: 8.00 am to 4.30 pm - Students queue up at one of two campus polling stations, to get their university ID cards checked by Hasan Dowani from Birzeit's Office of Student Affairs. Only full-time students registered for a BA or BSc. are eligible to vote. For this election, 2,798 students were eligible to vote.

Left: Next, the students have their ID cards checked against a list of full-time registered students, and are given two slips - one for the student council elections, another for the referendum on the new system. A student representative from each of the campus political parties is able to observe the voting process, and later the counting process. The elections were also observed by representatives from the Nablus-based Centre for Palestine Research and Studies.

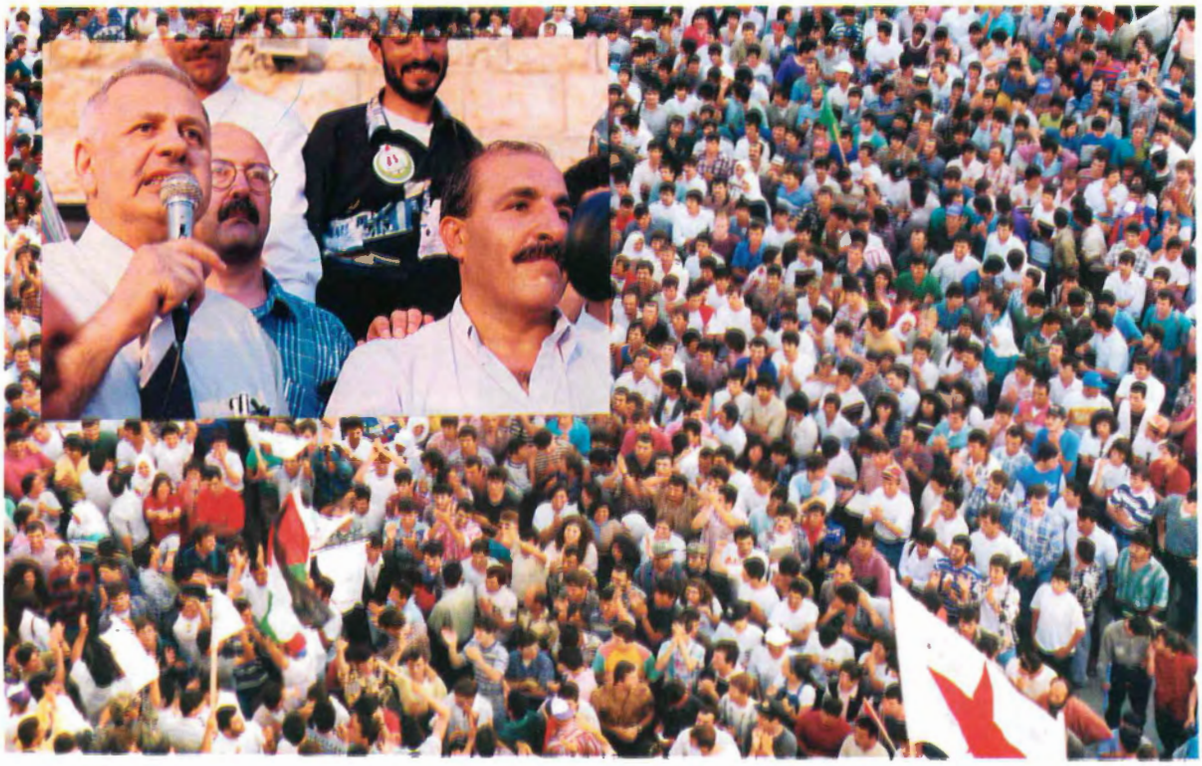
Above: Cubicles are provided for the students to vote privately. The students then deposit the two slips in separate, locked and sealed boxes, to be counted later.

... the counting process ...

Left and above: Taysir Al-Ukaili and Kamal Hamadan from the Computer Centre operate the optical reader that counts the votes. The machine reads one ballot paper per second, finishing the final calculation in a few seconds once all the data from the papers has been entered.

Below: President Hanna Nasir (left) and Dr. Nazmi Ju'beh, head of the elections committee, prepare to announce the vote. 3,000 students turned out to hear the result. Of the 51-seat parliament, the number of seats and percentage (rounded off) that each bloc gained was as follows:

Al-Quds (pro-Fatah) - 21 seats [40%]
Islamic - 18 seats [34%]
Homeland and Democracy (pro-left) - 8 seats [15%]
Union and Progressive (pro-PPP) - 3 seats [5%]
Progress and Democracy (pro-left) - 1 seat [3%]
Independence (pro-FIDA) - 0 seats [1%]
Students Rights (independent) - 0 seats [1%]
Independent student Nadir Christo - 0 seats [1%]



.... and the celebrations!

Above: Students celebrate their respective victories. **Top left:** Ibrahim Khreisha (Al-Quds bloc), student council president in the 1992/93 academic year is held aloft after securing the presidency again; **Top right:** Fakhri Sabbah, last year's president, embraces another member of the Islamic bloc after securing 18 seats this year; **Bottom right:** A Progress and Democracy bloc candidate celebrates getting a seat. Under the new system, smaller blocs can get representation on the student council; **Bottom left:** Ahmed Abu Laban sits amongst the colourful flags of the Homeland and Democracy bloc; **Directly above:** The sports officer of the Al-Quds bloc joins in the fun.

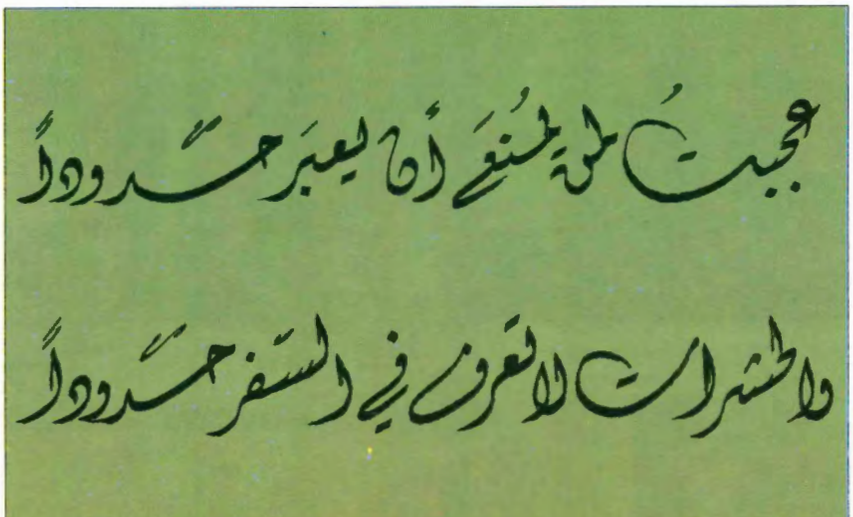
Right: The aftermath. After a frenzied week of campaigning, a lone student sits on the cafeteria roof as the sun goes down, watching the dancing and celebration carry on into the evening.

Insects don't have borders

The Birzeit University Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences has been attempting to tackle the widespread regional problem of pests that damage agricultural crops in the face of Israeli restrictions on the movement of training and outreach staff. Yet the pests that destroy crops are free to cross borders and checkpoints, leaving the economic livelihood of all peoples in the region, including Israelis, at risk.

The Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (CEOHS) was established at Birzeit in 1982, in the words of director Ramzi Sansur, "in an environmental vacuum." Realising that there was a need for foundational research into the state of Palestinian industry and agriculture, the Centre began a series of investigations into what problems the environment faced in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"We found," says Sansur, "that agriculture played a critical role in the national economy, whereas industry occupied a relatively minor place." The CEOHS therefore began to look at the agricultural industry, finding that pesticide use threatened both the Palestinian environment and its agriculture future.



Above: An original work of proverb-style Arabic calligraphy by student Mohammed Abu Obeid, produced for this newsletter. The text reads: "I wonder at how human beings are banned from crossing borders when insects do not know borders in their travels."

Pesticides consist of up to as much of 40% of a local farmer's agricultural budget, and are sold to the farmers by Israeli suppliers and their agents in the West Bank. Sansur does not mince his words, "Profit is the driving force behind the sale of pesticides, not need."

The irresponsibility of the pesticide suppliers is evidenced by the lack of instruction they offer to farmers who, according to Sansur, "really have no knowledge of what they are dealing with." This, coupled with the fact that labelling is often in Hebrew, has led many into a mentality that, "if one drop per litre of water is good, ten drops is better". These pesticides kill off the "natural enemies" of plant pests as well as the pests themselves.

The pests that survive have often built up a resistance to agrochemicals and have freedom from these natural predators to reproduce at will. As a poster in the CEOHS proclaims, "Natural enemies are our allies."

An agricultural scientist that visited the CEOHS last year did some field research in the Jordan Valley, looking for natural enemies of the white fly, a pest that has been reaping destruction among tomato crops. With the heavy use of pesticides in the area, among the highest in the world, the agriculturist was unable to find any significant amounts of the fly's natural enemies. When he returned to the university, he briefly spent time searching in the area around the campus, which is not agricultural land and therefore, where no pesticides are used. He found many of them.

The "solution" when confronted with a resurgence of pests, in the eyes of many farmers, is to use more pesticides. In the short term this may work, but in the long term there are heavy costs to pay in environmental damage and a real threat to human health.

The threat

The danger lies in the fact that around 40% of the pesticides used (a minimum of 1,300 in the West Bank in 1992) are chemicals whose sale or use has been banned or severely restricted by governments according to organisations such as the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Pesticide Action Network and the World Health Organisation. Indeed, even as late as 1992, Israel still permitted the use of DDT (see box on facing page), internationally recognised as highly dangerous due to its marked and harmful carcinogenic residue that persists in the environment for years after use.

The head of the two-year-old environmental department of the Israeli Civil Administration (the body responsible for administrative matters in the Occupied Territories) used to advocate the use of DDT in the Jordan Valley until the CEOHS exposed this. In the last two years, however, Israel has become more constructively active in environmental matters.

Sansur describes Israeli pesticide suppliers as participating "in a conspiracy and a cover-up of the horrible effects pesticides have on human health and the environment."

One of the most popular chemicals, Methamidophos, was registered in the *1991 Consolidated List of Products Whose Consumption and/or Sale Have Been Banned, Withdrawn, Severely Restricted or not Approved by Governments* published by the UN Department of International Economic and Social Affairs as having been severely restricted by some countries as early as 1982.

Methamidophos causes "delayed peripheral neuropathy" - in other words, the nerves in feet and hands are damaged, causing a loss of sensation over time.

Other examples include Maneb, which is mutagenic (causes mutation), teratogenic (interferes with the foetus and can cause birth defects) and carcinogenic.

Integrated pest management

"The real solution," says Sansur, "is a regional integrated pest management programme. We, the Palestinians, cannot solve this problem by ourselves. Neither can the Jordanians, Egyptians, Syrians or Israelis. We are all dependent on a regional solution." Nadi Farraj, an agronomist working in the CEOHS , put it bluntly: "Insects don't have borders," he says, "they go wherever they please."

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an ecological solution to the problem with a history of 30 years of successful implementation in both agricultural and urban settings. It aims to avoid the traps of conventional chemical pest control such as: pests developing resistance to pesticides; the indiscriminate killing of natural enemies of pests; harmful residues; health hazards; the costly administration of pesticide regulation; the depletion of natural resources, as pesticides are usually made from non-renewable fossil fuels; and the cost of expensive agricultural chemicals to small farmers. The aim of IPM is not to cease the use of pesticides, but to use them "wisely", according to Sansur, "This way we avoid the failure of the agricultural industry in the long term, economic loss in the long term, damage to human health in the long term. All we lose is short term financial gain. You can carry out successful agriculture with a wise use of pesticides."

The CEOHS began preparation for the first stage of its IPM programme in 1991. "The only first stage we could carry out under the present political conditions," Sansour points out, "was to begin holding 'Safe use of pesticides' courses for local farmers in the Jordan Valley, including instruction on how to dose, the use of protective clothing and teaching on the value of natural enemies." The course focused on the major agricultural areas in the Jordan Valley, the north of the country and the Hebron area in the south. To date, the programme has trained 400 individuals working in the agricultural sector, including 50 women. Training for the farmers is given by three employees of the CEOHS, all with a practical background in agriculture: Nadi Farraj, an agronomist from Bethlehem, trained in Khadouri College near Tulkarm and described by Sansur as, "one of the encyclopaedias of Palestinian agriculture"; Mahmoud Hammad, also an agronomist who was trained in the Soviet Union, whose dialogue-style method of teaching is very popular with the farmers and has resulted in a significant amount of useful feedback for the Centre; and Hanan Halaweh, a graduate of An-Najah University in Nablus, bringing with her agricultural engineering skills and a "dynamism" that has worked very well in the courses she runs for women. "All three," Sansur says, "complement each other very well and this is extremely important." The IPM programme at Birzeit has been funded and assisted by a variety of organisations including: the International Arid Lands Consortium through the auspices of the University of Illinois; ANERA; CCFD; ASSP; and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

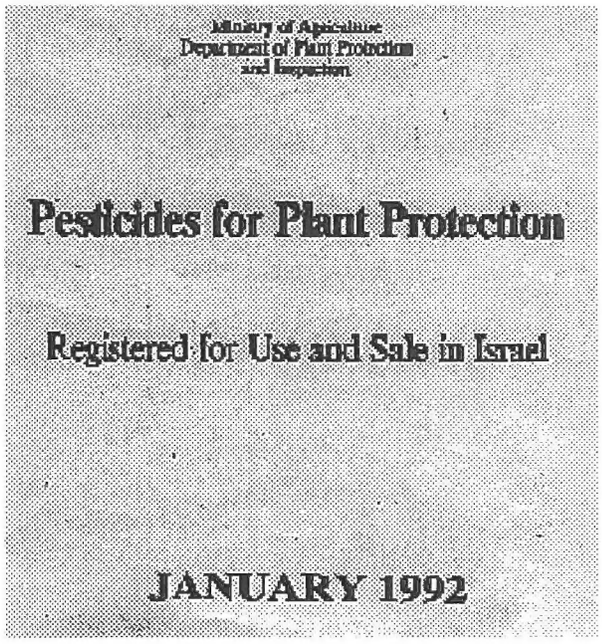
....*continued on next page*

- DDT -

Dichloro-diphenyl Trichloroethane (DDT) has been internationally recognised since the late 70's and early 80's as highly dangerous due to its marked and harmful residue that persists in the environment for years after use. Israel still permitted the use of DDT even as late as 1992.

Selected countries and final dates of prohibition of the use of DDT in agriculture:

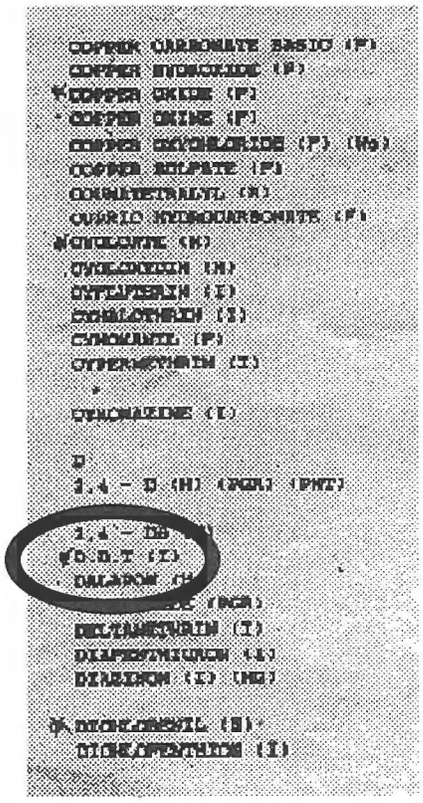
Argentina (1972); Canada (1978); China (1982); Cuba (1970); Cyprus (1976); European Community (1988); Spain (1975); UK (1984); Hungary (1968); Norway (1970); Sweden (1975); USA (1981).


Ministry of Agriculture
Department of Plant Protection and Inspection

Pesticides for Plant Protection

Registered for Use and Sale in Israel

JANUARY 1992



Above: The 1992 Israeli government document from the Department of Plant Protection and Inspection in the Ministry of Agriculture, showing continuing use of DDT (entry on list circled) as late as 1992. The 1994 edition no longer had the entry for DDT, use of it having been prohibited in 1993.

Above: The CEOHS's Nadi Farraj, giving a 'Safe Use of Pesticides' course to farmers in Qalqilia, in the north-western tip of the West Bank. Denial of permits to staff members have seriously affected their ability to carry out these important training courses.
Right: A farmer demonstrates practical safety clothing for use when spraying pesticides. *Photos by Yasser Darweesh.*

Setbacks

Unfortunately, the IPM programme has suffered some setbacks since the Israeli closure of the Occupied Territories in March 1993. Permits for the outreach workers began to be refused, preventing them from travelling to Gaza to begin a series of "Safe use of pesticides" courses there.

Nadi Farraj was able to travel to the United States in May 1995 to participate in an important conference entitled, "Organising IPM Extension Programmes." However, Mahmoud Hammad was unable to get permission from Israel to go. Attempts to secure permits individually and through representations by Birzeit University and by Mr. Walid Sadek, member of the Israeli Knesset and Israeli Deputy Minister of Agriculture, have proved fruitless.

The usual reason for denying Palestinian permits - "security" - really makes no sense in light of the reality of the problem that both Israeli and Palestinian farmers are facing. One example of this is the flower thrips that arrived on Israeli imports from Holland, which have destroyed the Palestinian fava bean crop. Israel itself does not grow fava beans, but now the thrips have begun to attack the Israeli flower crops. Three years ago the existence of the thrips was first noted but agriculturists knew nothing about them. One-and-a-half years later, there has been major damage, giving some idea of the speed with which this can take place. With all the agricultural sectors in the region standing to lose out, the only ones to gain out of this kind of policy will be the pests themselves.

Some other work of the CEOHS

Water testing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

The Union of Physicians and Dentists commissioned the CEOHS to undertake a survey of all drinking water wells in the West Bank. In 1990, the Centre signed a contract with the Jerusalem Water Undertaking/Ramallah District to perform a long term survey of water quality in their network, the largest in the West Bank, covering four metropolitan areas and 52 villages.

The CEOHS regularly monitors the biological and chemical content of water from 170 sampling stations in the West Bank, and has recently opened a satellite station in Gaza.

Pharmaceutical testing

Pharmaceuticals have been produced locally in the Occupied Territories since 1967, and until the late 1980s were not subjected to any form of control. Emulations of foreign drugs account for about half the market. There are five times the number of generic medicines available in the Occupied Territories than the recommended number on the World Health Organisation Essential Drugs List.

CEOHS takes random pharmaceutical samples from across the Occupied Territories and works with Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the latter of whom is the largest prescriber of pharmaceuticals in Palestine, to ensure that drugs meet rigid quality control standards.

The Centre was recently accredited by the Palestinian Authority as an official laboratory. The PA also invites funders who wish to support the work of the laboratory to write to:

Ramzi Sansur
Director
Centre for Environmental
& Occupational Health Sciences
Birzeit University
P.O. Box 14, Birzeit
West Bank, Palestine.

Tel: +972-2-998-2102 Fax: +972-2-998-2166

The CEOHS is also available via e-mail:
rsansur@ceohs.birzeit.edu

Focus for action: the permanant struggle for academic freedom

A recurrent theme

A recurrent theme throughout the history of Birzeit University Newsletters has been the issue of academic freedom. Looking back through past issues, one is confronted with headlines such as: "Birzeit University ~~reopens~~ closed" (July 1982); "Military closes campus" (February 1984); "Double closure: double burden" (May 1984); "Report scores army abuses" (January 1985); "Birzeit protests closure" (April 1985); "Double travel ban" (July 1985); "Administrative detention" (October 1985); "Student Council President detained" (February 1986); "Army gunfire wounds three" (May 1986); "Students under fire" (February 1987); "Foreign students beaten, detained" (October 1987); "Year of closure, year of violations" (March 1989); "Birzeit still closed" (September 1991); "Bring all the deportees home!" (March 1993); and "Academic operations crippled by closure" (September 1993).

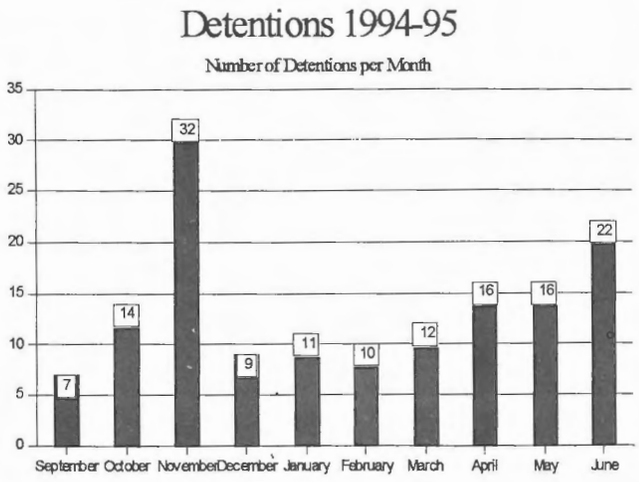
The permanent struggle?

In this post-Oslo accord era, one is tempted to believe that the days of Israeli violations of academic freedom and human rights are drawing to a close, but a look at the situation, particularly evidence collected by the Human Rights Action Project (HRAP) at the university, tells another story.

In the wake of the September 1993 Oslo accord between the PLO and Israel, HRAP reported 192 students and staff were detained in seperate incidents during 1994.

This figure represents the second highest number of detentions since records began ten years ago. Similarly, since January 1994, as many as nine violent night-time raids have been carried out by the Israeli military on student apartments. One student was wounded by gunfire as he ran away in fear.

Although the recent events can be considered to be human rights violations, Birzeit University believes them to additionally violate of internationally-accepted standards of academic freedom.



Source: Human Rights Action Project, 1995.

Harassment of students during exams

Students in danger of arrest for seeking to study without 'permission' from Israel (see Gazan students article overleaf) are often unable to concentrate on their studies. In the fortnight of final exams many students ran for the mountains after Israeli army raids on student homes on the night of 11/12 June 1995 resulted in the detention of 11 students. The students, who spent a night in the mountains, bringing back memories of similar events in April 1994, arrived for their exams the next day at the university looking haggard after a poor night's sleep.

The harsh travel restrictions that afford students this tenuous legal status have resulted in a numbers of serious problems for both students and staff in the current academic year.

For the second consecutive summer, a delegation of staff and students from Birzeit's Institute of Archaeology were invited by the Jordanian Yarmouk University to participate in an archaeological excavation in Jordan. This opportunity provides the students with essential field experience and a hands-on knowledge of archaeology. Israeli military law required these students to apply for permission to travel abroad. When each student returned to his home district to apply, two were refused permission and a third was informed that he would only be granted permission to leave the country for either one or nine months, not for two as required for the programme. In the end the trip was cancelled largely because several permits were still outstanding as the travel date came and went, despite appeals from the university to the Israeli offices responsible for granting the permits.

Similarly, student Ahmad Abu Laban, a fourth year student in the faculty of arts and an active member of the student council, was selected and given a scholarship to represent Palestinian students at an International Student Week in Ilmenau, Germany. Students were set to gather at the symposium held from May 28th until June 4th to discuss issues of common interest and exchange ideas. Ahmed's request for a *laissez passez* (travel document) was turned down by the Israeli authorities, who claimed he presented an unspecified "security risk". In the summer of 1993, Ahmed had experienced similar problems but had managed to secure his document after the intervention of numerous human rights organisations. This year, he was eventually forced to inform the Ilmenau committee that he was unable to attend.

Protest

Birzeit University reaffirms that the denial of travel permission to staff and students at the university, and the harassment of students during their final exams, is illegal under international law. The university asks all its friends worldwide to express concern about the issues related in this newsletter to:

Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, Minister of Defence
Fax: +972-2-664-838 or +972-3-691-7915.

Mr. David Liba'i, Minister of Justice
Fax: +972-2-285-438.

New report on Gazan students shows

During Birzeit University's first semester of the 1994/95 academic year, around one-third of its 350 students from Gaza were not granted permission to attend any of the semester. Midway through the semester, Israel agreed to grant permission to around two-thirds of the students, on the condition that they signed a declaration saying they supported the current peace process. These students were to be "guinea pigs", their behaviour determining when and if any of the other 1,300 students from the Gaza Strip studying in the West Bank higher education institutions would be granted a permit, according to a 13 December 1994 letter from defence minister Yitzhak Rabin to Palestinian human rights and legal centre Al-Haq.

With 8,000 students graduating from Gazan high schools each year, a figure five times greater than the capacity of the Strip's only two universities, it is not a luxury but a necessity that these young people are granted access to West Bank institutions.

The permit system

A Gazan student needs to hold concurrently no less than three separate permits to complete one semester, each with its own separate application procedure. The first, a magnetic identity card necessary for exiting the Strip, allows Israel to track by computer the exact dates an individual exits and re-enters to the Strip. The second permit is necessary for travel through the part of Israel between the Strip and the West Bank. Usually valid for only one or two days, it must be supplemented on arrival at the university by the third permit that allows residency in the West Bank. This permit is usually only valid for three months, whereas an academic semester is usually four months long and its renewal (a 'fourth permit') is far from assured.

The process is characterised, above all, by its arbitrary nature. Permits refused to students on 'security grounds' several times in a row may be unexpectedly granted and permits are often refused to students with no record of security offences. Valid permits are often confiscated by soldiers at checkpoints or cancelled en masse in the name of 'security' when Israel seals off the Occupied Territories, such as after the October 1994 kidnapping of Cpl. Nahshon Waxman and Tel Aviv bus bombing.

Families have literally been divided by Israel's policy, with students frightened to return home to Gaza during university holidays in case they cannot return to their studies. 32-year-old Emad Sharif, an employee in Birzeit University's Electrical Engineering department has been separated from his wife and six-month-old baby daughter since late summer 1994. Emad is from Gaza while his wife is from the West Bank, a sociology student at Birzeit. Despite repeated applications to their respective Civil Administration offices, Emad remains trapped in Gaza, his wife in Ramallah unable to visit each other.

For students who are denied permits, the inducement to carry on their education without consent from Israel is great. Students hang onto the axles of cement lorries and hide in trucks carrying fruit and other goods to exit the Strip, swim around the border into Israel, or bluff their way across the quieter border points using Egyptian identity documents. Students already at the university travel to and from their homes nervously avoiding checkpoints. Such students are considered by Israel as 'illegally' continuing their education and are therefore in danger of detention, large fines (currently 450 NIS) and in some cases, torture.

HRAP publishes report

Nine large-scale night time raids of Gazan students' apartments have taken place so far since January 1994. Albert Aghazarian, director of public relations at Birzeit University, believes that Israel intentionally makes use of the students' tenuous status in the West Bank to target and manipulate individuals it wishes to harass or use for its own ends. A February 1995 publication of the Human Rights Action Project (HRAP) at Birzeit entitled *MAKING EDUCATION ILLEGAL Students from the Gaza Strip: Israeli restrictions and international reactions*, the most comprehensive report on the issue to date, includes the case of a Birzeit student - 'Faisal' - that illustrates this conclusion;

> *Faisal was arrested at a checkpoint outside the university in the wake of the blanket cancellation of permits following the 19 October 1994 bombing of a municipal bus in Tel Aviv. Despite the immediate intervention of university officials at the scene, Faisal was taken to the interrogation wing of Ramallah Prison to be interrogated by agents of Shin Bet, the Israeli security apparatus. Faisal had previously been arrested, fined and deported to Gaza for a permit violation earlier in the year.*
>
> *The agenda of the Shin Bet officers was to recruit Faisal as a collaborator, providing them with information about political activity and individual activists at the university. They offered money and permits to study if he agreed. When Faisal refused, the officers called up his file on the computer and threatened to rape his mother and sister. He was beaten until his arm broke and one of his eardrums was damaged.*
>
> *The senior Shin Bet officer then commanded the other officers to leave the room and took out his gun. While removing all the bullets except one, he said, "You only have one choice, to work with us. If you don't I will kill you." Showing Faisal the remaining bullet, he closed the chamber and spun it, telling him, "You have three seconds to agree to work for us. Do you want to pray to Allah before you die?"*
>
> *Counting to three, the commander pointed the gun at his head and pulled the trigger, but the gun clicked on an empty chamber. Repeating his threats, he pulled the trigger again with the same result. Faisal was eventually fined and released, having his magnetic identity card confiscated, on the condition he return to Gaza. The severity of his injuries necessitated medical treatment however, delaying him for a few days, after which Faisal decided to remain in the West Bank to complete his studies. His house was raided about a month later, and even though he had been sleeping on the roof to avoid detection, he was discovered and deported back to Gaza rather than detained for a longer period, on the condition that he withdrew a complaint he had filed against the Shin Bet about his mistreatment.*

For Gazan students, the existence of the many and varied international human rights covenants and accords that Israel has signed means nothing. From the hundreds of examples of the selective enforcing of human rights law that history has sadly given us, it is clear that the international community follows a different agenda. Until it fulfils its declared responsibility to discipline countries contravening these covenants, consulting the oppressed rather than relying on information from the oppressor, such violations will continue *ad nauseam*.

continuing violation of academic freedoms

Left: Debris after a night time raid on student apartments in Abu Qash, April 12th 1995. The most recent raid, which did not only include Gazan students exclusively, took place on the night of the 19th/20th June 1995, during the weeks of final exams. 11 students were under interrogation during this period and many others, on hearing news of the raid, fled to the mountains around the university to hide. *Photo provided by students.*

Chronology of events affecting Birzeit's Gazan students since the publication of *MAKING EDUCATION ILLEGAL* (27 January - 1 May 1995)

27 January 1995	269 of 363 registered Gazan students at Birzeit issued with red-coloured permits
28 January 1995	Beit Lid suicide bombing. All existing West Bank residency permits cancelled by Israel.
31 January 1995	Palestinian Authority (PA) issues letter telling students with cancelled permits to remain in the West Bank because of an agreement between the Authority and Israel.
18 February 1995	Beginning of second semester of Birzeit's 1994/95 academic year. 333 Gazan students registered at the university.
25 February 1995	Release of English-language version of MAKING EDUCATION ILLEGAL, a 42-page publication by the Human Rights Action Project at Birzeit University.
February 1995	HRAP reports that February was a "generally quiet month" with "few arrests" of Gazan students. No new permits issued but old 'permit and letter from PA' system seems to be working.
8-21 March 1995	New green-coloured permits issued, in batches of 5-20 at a time. By 20 March, over one month after the beginning of the second semester, only 134 permits had been distributed.
22-23 March 1995	Two students with new permit go to Ramallah Civil Administration to apply for West Bank residency permits. Their existing permits are confiscated.
23 March 1995	Truck suspected to be carrying explosives, driven by 2 alleged 'Hamas activists', discovered and blown up by Israeli military in Tel Shiva.
25 March 1995	All existing West Bank residency permits cancelled by Israel. Students required to get new blue-coloured permits.
29 March 1995	Two Israeli soldiers enter house of some Gazan students in Ramallah, to "search for guns". Two students were beaten during the search and no guns were found.
12 April 1995	Israeli military arrests nine students in a night-time raid of five student homes in Abu Qash village next to Birzeit University. This is the seventh time in 12 months that such raids have been conducted. Eight of the students were from Gaza. Six were released the next day accused of 'studying without permission'. All the houses were searched and textbooks and other university materials were taken.
25 April 1995	One of the remaining two detained students from 12 April raid released. Last student expected to be released on 3 May 1995. Release of Arabic-language version of MAKING EDUCATION ILLEGAL, a 61-page publication by the Human Rights Action Project at Birzeit University
April 1995	For most of the month, only 14 Gazan students had permits to study.
1 May 1995	As of beginning of May 1995, 250 of the 333 Gazan students at Birzeit have permits. Of the remaining 83, around half have security clearance and are expected to get permits.

International relations: visits to

Public Relations Office notes highest ever number of visitors in 1994/95 academic year

Since the beginning of the 1994/95 academic year, the Public Relations Office at Birzeit has noted that over 5,368 visitors have been received by the university.

The office has receieved many groups from Europe and North America, usually providing a campus tour with an introduction to the history and unique nature of the university. Some groups, who represent a particular interest, require special meetings to be set up tailored to their needs. Two groups of Dutch journalism students have this year met with Walid Batrawi, who is a student at the university while also working with the British Broadcasting Corporation, for an introduction to the situation of Palestinian journalists.

This year, many local schools have come on visits to the university, accounting for around half of the total numbers of visitors. The university also regularly holds conferences and exhibitions that draw many visitors.

Palestinian educationalists visit Norway

Since Norway's role in the September 1993 Oslo agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Israel, the door has opened to new cooperation between Palestinian educational institutions and their Norwegian counterparts. In late May 1994, a group of Palestinian educationalists visited the universities of Oslo and Bergen. The group was comprised of Dr. Gabi Baramki (then Vice-President of Birzeit), Dr. Abdul Salem Abdul Ghani, Dr. Lily Feidy and Dr. Riyad Amin. The Birzeit group met with administrators and heads of departments from the two universities to discuss future cooperation between Norwegian and Palestinian universities, including the exchange of faculty and students from the two colleges of Arts and Sciences. Nine Palestinian students were chosen to pursue masters degrees at the University of Bergen.

First British Government Minister visits Birzeit to see the university's scientific work

On 5th October 1994, Mr. David Hunt MP, British Cabinet Minister with responsibility for Science and Technology, visited Birzeit with a delegation of British representatives and administrators. The delegation included Sir William Stewart, Chief Scientific Advisor to the British Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr. David Grey from the British Geological Survey, the British Consul General Mr. Richard Dalton and the director of the British Council in East Jerusalem, Mr. Peter Skelton. The group was visiting the occupied territories to explore ways in which British institutions could expand links with their Palestinian counterparts.

Birzeit Vice-President Dr. Ibrahim Abu Lughod welcomed the group, noting and acknowledging that during the period of the British Mandate, Britain contributed to the Palestinian educational system, contrasting this with the Israelis, "who have never put one penny into it." Abu Lughod drew attention to the fact that 85% of Birzeit's 450 faculty have been trained in European and American institutions, "making Birzeit truly an international university, as well as a national institution that draws students from all over Palestine."

Above: Dr. Ibrahim Abu Lughod meets British Minister Mr. David Hunt at Birzeit in October. *Photo by Yasser Darweesh.*

Minister Hunt responded by saying how delighted he was to visit Birzeit and brought with him the best wishes of the Prime Minister, his ministerial collegues and the European Community. He spoke of how his predecessor and he were the first British Cabinet Ministers to be allocated a portfolio specifically for Science and Technology in over 30 years, underlining the increasing importance Britian is putting on these areas.

Dean of the Science faculty, Dr. Abdul Salem Abdul Ghani, spoke of the needs of the faculty and made an impassioned plea for increased provision of fellowships for Palestinian lecturers and professors to be able to study in Britian. He noted the current disparity between assistance provided by the British Council for Israeli and Palestinian faculty. In the days following the meeting, the British representatives responded positively to this point undertaking to look at new ways of funding fellowships for Palestinian faculty.

The delegation visited the university library and science building and were given a briefing by Dr. Ramzi Sansur from the Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (CEOHS). The group was impressed by the work of the CEOHS (see article on page 14) and stated that the British Government "very much supports the work of the Centre", promising to look at the proposal for a food quality control unit currently under consideration by the British Overseas Development Administration.

Finnish delegation discusses plans for new Media Centre in Birzeit

Marti Passio, Head of International Relations in the Finnish Parliament, and Arto Kanner, Finnish Ambassador, visited Birzeit on 8 October 1994 to discuss plans for a Media Training Centre at the university. The establishment of an independent and pluralistic Palestinian electronic media in Palestine is long overdue. Last year, YLE (the Finnish broadcasting company), the International Federation of Journalists, and the Union of Journalists in Finland agreed to assist Birzeit in establishing such a centre in the belief that, "the dissemination of information, gathered and transmitted according to independent professional criteria, can only enhance peaceful inter-communal co-existence, which in the final analysis will contribute to peace in the Middle East.

Birzeit hit an all-time high

Scandanavian countries have made a commitment to donating the equipment necessary for the proposed courses in: journalism in the electronic media; the training of artistic staff such as directors, lighting, sound and camera persons, editors and set designers, technicians in video and sound, media analysts and administrators. As well as providing courses for aspiring professionals in the media, it is hoped that Birzeit will become a centre for new Palestinian radio and television stations. It is intended that the proposed centre be located in the new student building, currently under construction.

Women's Studies Centre has a busy year

The last nine months have been a busy time for the Women's Studies Centre at Birzeit. In the 1993/94 academic year the Centre made significant progress in looking at library aquisitions and translating key texts into Arabic; fundraising and infrastructure development; research strategy and planning; curriculum development and other internal administration. After this year of groundwork and preparation, the Centre received full university approval as a recognised programme in the Faculty of Arts, offering a minor in women's studies.

One of the first such programmes in the Arab world, the Centre has a three-pronged approach to its work, supplementing usual university activities of teaching and research with a community outreach programme aims at developing women's abilities, consciousness and strategies in both the social and political sphere.

In June and July 1994, the Centre held two seminars aimed at providing an overview on women in Arab society. The first seminar was held on June 13th, entitled "Arab women and political life," presented by Jordanian advocate Asma Khader, head of the Jordanian Women's Union and a member of the committee that drafted the Jordanian Constitution.

The second seminar was held on July 16th, involving Judith Tucker, a history professor from Georgetown University and author of "Women in Egypt in the 19th Century" as well as many other articles about women and the family in both Palestine and Egypt in the 18th and 19th centuries. The title of the seminar was, "Methodologies to understand the history of women in the Arab World."

Following these foundational conferences, the Centre brought the timescale forward, holding a workshop from 25th until 26th September 1994 entitled, "Women in Palestinian society: current research and future perspectives." The workshop aimed to identify and evaluate what has been written since 1967 from a women's perspective in the fields of education, economics, culture and social welfare.

The Centre is on e-mail, at: **pjohnson@ws.birzeit.edu**

Palestinian Ambassador to Paris visits

Layla Shahid, the Palestinian Ambassador to Paris, made her first visit to the university on 21 December 1994. She met with university president Dr. Hanna Nasir and the University Council, as well as members of the Women's Studies Programme, promising to encourage support for the university through UNESCO in France. Prior to her posting in Paris, Ms. Shahid was Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland and the Netherlands. Over the years, she has been a solid supporter of the aims and objectives of Birzeit University.

Fourth International Academic Conference

Birzeit held its fourth international academic conference from 10th to 12th March 1994, organised by the Mediterranian Studies Unit at Birzeit. The theme of the three days was "Cultural encounters across the Mediterranean: Palestine and Europe," and covered themes including historical and present-day relations between the two areas; the power of gender, citizenship and the media in shaping encounters; and cultural differences and areas of confrontation.

Papers from the conference are expected to be published in a booklet form in September 1995 and can be ordered from Dr. Salim Tamari, Sociology Department, at the university address or by e-mail: **stamari@soc.birzeit.edu**

UNESCO visits Birzeit

Above: Dr. Hanna Nasir shows UNESCO Deputy-Director General Dr. Adnan Badran around the Birzeit Campus. Dr. Badran has responsibility for sciences at UNESCO. Another UNESCO official, Dr. Omar Masalha, also visited the university. Dr. Masalha, ex-Palestinian Ambassador to UNESCO, now works to facilitate UNESCO funding in Palestine. *Photo by Yasser Darweesh.*

Canadian universities representatives visit

Karin McBride and Denis Leclaire, representatives of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) visited the university on 27 March 1995. Ms. McBride is manager of policy and liaison at the international relations and programmes department of the AUCC. Mr Leclaire is the director of international activities at St. Mary's College in Canada.

The suggestion for their visit was made by several members of the faculties of Canadian institutions, including Carlton and McGill University. As the national association of Canadian universities, the AUCC was interested in learning more about Birzeit's goals, activities, particular research interests and views on ways Canadian and Palestinian institutions can work fruitfully together. The AUCC will be circulating details of their visit to the university community in Canada to heighten their awareness of developments and specific points of contact at Birzeit.

Sir Michael Atiyah on royal visit to Birzeit!

Academic independence in Palestinian universities was the subject of a lecture given by Sir Michael Atiyah in January 1995.

Sir Michael, President of the Royal Society, a prestigious organisation which represents the scientific community in Great Britain, warned that "once a government gets involved in a university's affairs, it doesn't leave."

Speaking to about 120 professors and students on January 10th, the internationally acclaimed mathematician asked Palestinian universities to be "centres of independent thought and critical analysis." He explained that young people come to university with ideals and that "they should be encouraged to pursue their ideals and not be turned into cynics.

Above: Dr. Hanna Nasir presents Sir Michael Atiyah, a sponsor of Friends of Birzeit University (UK), with a plaque after his lecture visit to Birzeit. *Photo by Yasser Darweesh.*

He warned that government aid should be taken by universities only after much deliberation and when no other sources of funding are available, "because all money comes with strings attached."

Instead of dependence on the government, there should be some sort of marriage between universities and the private sector, whereby companies pay for services and research and thus cover a large part of university budgets.

However, Palestinian industry rarely carries out market research, management evaluation and product development studies as is the case in the West. This is because: the Palestinian business community is unaware of what universities can offer; universities have not been very active in marketing their services to businesses; and usually the amounts of money invested in local ventures are so small that research is seen as an unnecessary expense, as some local businessmen explain.

Atiyah added that wealthy people have had a major role in the development of Western universities. But the lack of a philanthropic heritage among wealthy Palestinians has left Palestinian universities with no choice but to take as much official aid as possible. "We have no Palestinian Rothschild," as Yasser Arafat lamented in a newspaper interview the week prior to Atiyah's visit.

Since the 1970s, university aid was primarily channeled through the PLO. After the lack of PLO aid caused by the Gulf crisis of 1990, universities started to become more aggressive in fundraising and to move toward a free market system, where student tuition comprises a decent share of income.

The president of Birzeit, Dr. Hanna Nasir, stressed his desire to attain academic freedom and noted that Palestinian universities have suffered much from the lack of the same freedom during occupation. "We hope that the coming authority understands the importance of academic independence, which is the backbone of any educational institution," he said.

Atiyah is of Lebanese origin, although he spent some parts of his life in Egypt and Palestine. Last year he visited Lebanon for the first time in 30 years. "I'm trying to pick up my roots," he explained. Besides being president of the Royal Society, he is a master at Trinity College, Cambridge. His West Bank tour was part of a trip that took him to Jordan and Israel.

While in the West Bank, Atiyah also visited An-Najah National University and the Abu Dis College of Science and Technology. He said his visit was to establish contacts with and discover the needs of local universities.

Other conferences and lectures

RIWAQ 'restoration' lecture

The RIWAQ cultural centre for popular archaeology held the '1st Conference for Restoration in Palestine' from June 3rd to 4th 1995. Organised in conjunction with several other local and international organisations, Birzeit faculty members from the Architectural Engineering Department made two presentations. Dr. Su'ad Al-Ameri chaired a discussion on public policy of restoration of the infrastructure, while department head Dr. Shadi Ghadban presented a paper on "The role of the Palestinian universities in the restoration process."

Public lecture series

The public lecture series continued this year with a series of lectures looking at "The role of folklore in protecting national culture," presented by Dr. Sharif Kana'neh and Abdul Latif al-Bargouthi; "Palestine: current situation and future vision," from the former Palestinian ambassador to Russia, Mr. Nabil Amru, and "Palestine in the French media," by Suleiman Zeghidur.

The Cultural Studies and Philosophy Department held a seminar on 8 June 1994 entitled "The Middle East after the end of the Cold War," with professor Fred Haliday from the University of London's International Relations Department.

The Continuing Education Department hosted Mohammed Qursh, a financial analysis specialist, who gave an economics seminar on "Changing the private companies into public companies," in October 1994.

The student Islamic Bloc held a study day on 15 December 1994 to discuss Palestinian relations with Israel at this stage in the peace process, focussing on "The dangers of normalisation." Some members of faculty participated as well.

University erects campus memorial to student martyrs

Birzeit University recently raised a memorial to the eleven students who have been killed as a direct result of the Israeli occupation, since Birzeit became a university. The memorial, pictured below, is situated in the main square of the university and was completed in time for the Graduation Ceremony on 10 July 1995. Those who were killed hold a special place in the hearts of the university community and Palestinian society. They are known as 'martyrs', a reference to the Islamic religious belief that those who fall in the struggle for their homeland are given immediate entry to paradise.

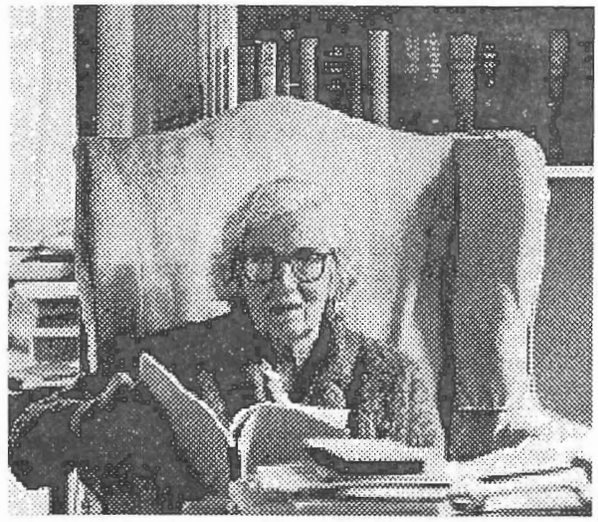
Some of the martyrs' names are well known, after their cases received international press attention. On December 4th, 1986 the world was shocked when two students from Gaza, Jawad Abu Selmieh and Sa'eb Dhahab, were shot dead on campus by the Israeli military. Musa Hanafi, a senior honours history student, was shot dead on April 13th, 1987, his case reported in, "Battlefield Tactics at Birzeit University", published by the Public Relations office. With extensive eye-witness testimony, the report carefully documents how the Israeli army opened fire without warning using live ammunition that killed Musa and wounded many others.

The eleven students names appearing on the marble memorial are:

1. Sharaf Khalil al-Tibi	November 21st, 1984
2. 'Isa Mahmud Shamasneh	August 15th, 1986
3. Jawad Joma'h Abu Selmieh	December 4th, 1986
4. Sa'eb Mahmoud Dhabab	December 4th, 1986
5. Musa Musbah Hanafi	April 13th, 1987
6. Abdallah Yusif 'Alawneh	November 11th, 1990
7. Ibrahim Abd al-Rahman Qassem	May 25th, 1991
8. Jamal Rashid Ghanem	March 22nd, 1992
9. Hazem Mohammed 'Eid	July 9th, 1992
10. 'Imad Abd al-Wahib Kulab	January 6th, 1994
11. Abd al-Men'am Muhammed Naji	May 31st, 1994

Above: The Martyr's Memorial at Birzeit. The text at the top in Arabic reads, "The martyrs of Birzeit University who fell in the struggle for freedom and independence." *Photo by Nigel Parry.*

In Memorium: Dorothy Hodgkin 12 May 1910 - 29 July 1994



Dorothy Hodgkin left her mark on the world in a way that few do. In her distinguished career, colleagues acknowledged her as "one of the foremost British scientists of this century" who, until her passing away last year after a lifelong battle with rheumatoid arthritis, had struggled to carry out her work despite the pain and inconvenience of disability.

Her research in x-ray crystallography that so impressed the scientific community, was inspired by her association with J D Bernal in Cambridge University, but most of her scientific work was done in Oxford, where she held for many years a Research Professorship of the Royal Society.

Her main achievement was in identifying the structures of Penicillin, Vitamin B12, Insulin, and other complex molecules of great biological and medical significance. For this work she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1964. The following year in Britain, she was awarded the highest civillian honour, the Order of Merit.

Dorothy was known and loved for her serenity, her gracious personality, and her profound compassion for humanity. It was the latter that was touched when she first visited Birzeit at the beginning of the 1980s, and she went on to serve as a sponsor of Friends of Birzeit University in the UK until the time of her death.

Dr. Gabi Baramki, former Vice-President of Birzeit University, recalled that when he attended a reception held for him by FoBZU at the House of Commons in December 1992, Dorothy made the long trip down to the meeting from her home in Oxford, despite her health.

She will be remembered by many here at Birzeit, both for her commitment to the university and the way in which she radiated the humanity that beats in the heart of every true scientist.